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ABSTRACT

A Stress Test designed to help college students increase awareness of stress and ways they deal with it is presented, along with suggestions to reduce stress. The stress test was presented at a workshop by George Washington University graduate students. The test's four scales measure ways that students cope with stress and the student's vulnerability to: stress from being frustrated or inhibited; having too much to do; and the presence of compulsive, time urgent, and excessively aggressive behavioral traits. The test involves a point system that gives respondents an idea of stress levels and the relative desirability of their coping strategies. The use of biodots, relaxation, and exercise to reduce stress is also briefly discussed. Biodots are dots connected to electrodes and finger tips to show stress level based on color codes. The student can be trained to relax and can watch the biodots change color and learn to monitor the body's signals of stress. Students can also learn to relax through muscle tightening and relaxation exercise, as well as by walking, swimming, and other exercise. (SW)

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Stress on the College Campus

by Wanda E. Gill

Abstract

Stress on the college campus is on the rise as is evidenced by the attrition rate in recent years. The increased suicide rate, occurrences of fatigues, loss of concentration, dramatic changes in sleeping and eating patterns and drug and alcohol abuse are symptomatic of stress on the college campus.

Reports like A Nation At Risk by the Commission on Excellence in Education address the mediocre to poor preparation students receive at the elementary and secondary levels. This mediocre preparation in academic subjects increases the student's stress level when he appears on the college campus.

The article addresses stress and provides specific ways to increase the college student's awareness of stress and to reduce the stress level.

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Stress is now recognized as a leading contributor to heart disease and other systems dysfunction. The preponderance of stress has been documented in the research in the areas of education by Smith (1968), Swick and Hanley (1980), management by Giammatteo and Giammatteo (1980), Levi (1967), theology by Mills (1971) and the work place generally by Basowitz (1955), Cooper and Payne (1978). Stress has been associated with anxiety (Bassowitz, 1955), depression in women (Belle, 1982), tension (Carruthers, 1974), coping (Monat and Lazarus, 1977) and distress (Schafer, 1978). Whether discussions are by area or related constructs, all authors indicated the debilitating and facilitating aspects of stress. Stress can be harmful if it is prolonged and if it is experienced by the individual as tension. Stress can be helpful if the alarm mechanism sounds, is reponded to and the tension eases.

The college campus shows the symptoms of stress: loss of concentration, lack of attention, changes in sleeping patterns, changes in eating habits, drug and/or alcohol abuse. There are no accurate figures on the direct association of these symptoms with stress. However, the occurrence of these symptoms with a population of underprepared students as described in A Nation At Risk and other reports increases the likelihood that the occurrence of the symptoms is directly related to stress on the college campus. Federal cuts in student loans and aid programs have increased students' levels of stress.

The success of tutorial programs, counseling and tutoring programs (Haynes, Turner and others, 1974, Romano and Young, 1974) and the absence of these symptoms (Kirkland and Hollandsworth, 1979) seem to point to a relationship between academic preparation for college and stress. It

appears that tutoring, counseling and study skills programs reduce stress for underprepared students.

How do you know you are under stress? A Stress Test presented at a workshop at GWU by several graduate students is presented as follows. The stress test reflects the theory presented by Benson (1975), Cox (1978), Davis (1980), Levi (1967), Mandell (1974), Monat and Lazarus (1977), Selze (1956) and Tanner (1976).

STRESS TEST

STRESS TEST - Part One

Read and choose the most appropriate answer for each of the 10 questions as it actually pertains to you.

1. When I can't do something "my way," I simply adjust to do it the easiest way.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Usually false, d) Almost always false.

2. I get "upset" when someone in front of me drives slowly.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Usually false, d) Almost always false.

3. It bothers me when my plans are dependent upon others.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Usually false, d) Almost always false.

4. Whenever possible, I tend to avoid large crowds.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Usually false, d) Almost always false.

5. I am uncomfortable having to stand in long lines.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Usually false, d) Almost always false.

6. Arguments upset me.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Usually false, d) Almost always false.

7. When my plans don't "flow smoothly," I become anxious.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Usually false, d) Almost always false.

8. I require a lot of room (space) to live and work in.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Usually false, d) almost always false.

9. When I am busy at some task, I hate to be disturbed.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Usually false, d) almost always false.

10. I believe that "All good things are worth waiting for."
    a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Usually false, d) Almost always false.

To score: 1 and 10 a = 1 pt., b = 2 pts., c = 3 pts., d = 4 pts.
2 - 9 a = 4 pts., b = 3 pts., c = 2 pts., d = 1 pt.

This test measures your vulnerability to stress from being "frustrated," i.e., inhibited. Scores in excess of 25 seem to suggest some vulnerability to this score of stress.

STRESS TEST - Part Two

Circle the letter of the response option that best answers the following 10 questions.

How often do you. . .

1. Find yourself with insufficient time to complete your work?
   a) Almost always, b) Very often, c) Seldom, d) Never.

2. Find yourself becoming confused and unable to think clearly because too many things are happening at once?
   a) Almost always, b) Very often, c) Seldom, d) Never.

3. Wish you had help to get everything done?
   a) Almost always, b) Very often, c) Seldom, d) Never.

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4. Feel your boss/professor simply expects too much from you?
   a) Almost always, b) Very often, c) Seldom, d) Never.

5. Feel your family/friends expect too much from you?
   a) Almost always, b) Very often, c) Seldom, d) Never.

6. Find your work infringing upon your leisure hours?
   a) Almost always, b) Very often, c) Seldom, d) Never.

7. Find yourself doing extra work to set an example to those around you?
   a) Almost always, b) Very often, c) Seldom, d) Never.

8. Find yourself doing extra work to impress your superiors?
   a) Almost always, b) Very often, c) Seldom, d) Never.

9. Have to skip a meal so that you can get work completed?
   a) Almost always, b) Very often, c) Seldom, d) Never.

10. Feel that you have too much responsibility?
    a) Almost always, b) Very often, c) Seldom, d) Never.

To score: a = 4 pts., b = 3 pts., c = 2 pts., d = 1 pt.
Total up your score for this exercise.

This test measures your vulnerability to "overload" i.e., having too much to do. Scores in excess of 25 seem to indicate vulnerability to this source of stress.

STRESS TEST - Part Three

Answer all questions as is generally true for you.

1. I hate to wait in lines.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Seldom true, d) Never true.

2. I often find myself "racing" against the clock to save time.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Seldom true, d) Never true.

3. I become upset if I think something is taking too long.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Seldom true, d) Never true.

4. When under pressure I tend to lose my temper.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Seldom true, d) Never true.

5. My friends tell me that I tend to get irritated easily.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Seldom true, d) Never true.

6. I seldom like to do anything unless I can make it competitive.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Seldom true, d) Never true.

7. When something needs to be done, I'm the first to begin even though the details may still need to be worked out.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Seldom true, d) Never true.

8. When I make a mistake it is usually because I've rushed into something without giving it enough thought and planning.
   a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Seldom true, d) Never true.

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9. Whenever possible I will try to do two things at once, like eating while working, or planning while driving or bathing.
a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Seldom true, d) Never true.

10. When I go on vacation, I usually take some work along just in case I get a chance.
a) Almost always true, b) Usually true, c) Seldom true, d) Never true.

To score: a = 4 pts., b = 3 pts., c = 2 pts., d = 1 pt.

This test measures the presence of compulsive, time urgent, and excessively aggressive behavioral traits. Scores in excess of 25 suggest the presence of one or more of these traits.

STRESS TEST - Part Four

How do you cope with the stress in your life? There are numerous ways--some are more effective than others; yet some coping strategies may actually be as harmful as the stress they are used to alleviate. This scale was created largely on the basis of results compiled by clinicians and researchers who sought to identify how individuals effectively cope with stress. This scale is an educational tool, not a clinical instrument. Therefore, its purpose is to inform you, the reader, of ways in which you can effectively and healthfully cope with the stress in your life, while at the same time, through a point system, give you some indication of the relative desirability of the coping strategies you are currently using.

Simply follow the instructions given for each of the 14 items listed below. When you have completed all of the items, total your points and place that score in the box provided.

1. Give yourself 10 points if you feel that you have a supportive family around you. ☐

2. Give yourself 10 points if you actively pursue a hobby. ☐

3. Give yourself 10 if you belong to some social or activity group that meets once a month (other than your family,). ☐

4. Give yourself 15 points if you are within five pounds of your "ideal" body-weight, considering your height and bone structure. ☐

5. Give yourself 15 points if you practice some form of "deep relaxation" at least three times a week. Deep relaxation exercises include meditation, imagery, Yoga, etc. ☐

6. Give yourself 5 points for each time you exercise thirty minutes or longer during the course of an average week. ☐

7. Give yourself 5 points for each nutritionally balanced and wholesome meal you consume during the course of an average day. ☐

8. Give yourself 5 points if you do something that you really enjoy which is "just for you" during the course of an average week. ☐

9. Give yourself 10 points if you have some place in your home that you can go in order to relax and/or be by yourself. ☐

10. Give yourself 10 points if you practice time management techniques in your daily life. ☐

11. Subtract 10 points for each pack of cigarettes you smoke during the course of an average day. ☐

12. Subtract 5 points for each evening during the course of an average week that you take any form of medication or chemical substance (including alcohol) to help you sleep. ☐

13. Subtract 10 points for each day during the course of an average week that you consume any form of medication or chemical substance (including alcohol) to reduce your anxiety or just calm you down. ☐

14. Subtract 5 points for each evening during the course of an average week that you bring work home; work that was meant to be done at your place of employment. ☐

☐ NOW CALCULATE YOUR TOTAL SCORE AND PLACE IT IN THE BOX ON THE LEFT. A "PERFECT" SCORE WOULD BE 115 POINTS. IF YOU SCORED IN THE 50-60 RANGE YOU PROBABLY HAVE AN ADEQUATE COLLECTION OF COPING STRATEGIES FOR MOST COMMON SOURCES OF STRESS. HOWEVER, YOU SHOULD KEEP IN MIND THAT THE HIGHER YOUR SCORE THE GREATER YOUR ABILITY TO COPE WITH STRESS IN AN EFFECTIVE AND HEALTHFUL MANNER.

BIODOTS

Biodots are dots which are connected to electrodes and finger tips to show the stress level of the student. The following color codes indicate the stress level.

Black	=	Very Tense
Amber	=	Tense
Yellow	=	Unsettled
Green	=	Involved (Normal)
Turquoise	=	Relaxing
Blue	=	Calm
Violet	=	Very Relaxed

The student can be trained to relax and can watch the biodots change color and learn to monitor the body's signals of stress. Biodots are a effective teaching tool.

RELAXATION

Through muscle tightening relaxation exercises in a quiet dimly lit room free of distractions, the college students can learn to relax. The exercises promote euphoric feelings and ease stress.

EXERCISE

Walking, swimming and other forms of exercise enable the college student to dissipate stress. The activity produces feelings of euphoria, as has been described extensively in the literature.

Stress must be recognized as a major problem on the college campus. Awareness is a two pronged process. One part of achieving awareness is the admission that a problem exists. The other part of awareness is the admission that the problem is situation rather than innate. The college student needs to admit that he/she is experiencing stress on the campus and then identify the specific areas of stress. If financial problems are

a source of stress or if academic underpreparedness is a source of stress, the college student needs to examine ways of relieving stress. A part-time job may be a solution to financial stress of some whereas a cooperative agreement program between the college and government or industry with a work-study format may be a solution for other students. Academic under-preparedness can be addressed by maintaining regular and consistent study hours and appointments with tutors, counselors and other support personnel. These strategies may be tools for coping. The student seeks alternatives or develops skills. In these instances, the student has clearly identified the problem and distinguished what can be changed and what cannot. The alternatives are limited only by the student's imagination. Through the admission that stress is the source of a specific problem, the student can increase the likelihood of being retained and graduated from the college he/she is attending.

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